

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PLAB, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH UNIONS REACT TO BARRE GOVERNMENT

SUMMARY: THE FORMATION OF THE BARRE GOVERNMENT, ITS EMPHASIS ON THE FIGHT AGAINST INFLATION AND THE RESULTING CHANGES IN THE FRENCH POLITICAL SCENE, HAVE MODIFIED SOMEWHAT THE TRADITIONAL SCENARIO FOR THE "RENTREE" AND THE RITUALISTIC SABRE RATTLING OF THE PRINCIPAL LABOR LEADERS. THE RITUAL, HOWEVER, OF MASS PROGRAMATIC SPEECHES WAS DULY OBSERVED. THE TONE OF CFDT LEADER MAIRE'S SPEECH, SOMEWHAT LESS UNEQUIVOCAL IN ITS CONDEMNATION OF THE NEW BARRE GOVERNMENT THAN THAT OF CGT LEADER SEGUY'S SPEECH, STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF CGT-CFDT UNITY TO BRING ABOUT ANY EFFECTIVE ACTION BY LABOR. MAIRE WARNED THE FAITHFUL

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THAT A VICTORY OF THE LEFT IN 1978 COULD NOT BE TAKEN

FOR GRANTED AND UNDERLINED THE NEED AS A RESULT FOR CONTINUING MOBILIZATION. SEGUY ASSERTED THAT A GOVERNMENT OF THE LEFT COULD COUNT ON THE CGT TO CARRY OUT THE COMMON PROGRAM, AND IMPLICITLY CONDEMNED LUKEWARM SOCIALISTS. THE SPEECHES REVEAL SHARP DIFFERENCES AND EVEN TENSION IN INTER-UNION RELATIONS; BUT ALTHOUGH SEGUY'S LINE IS MORE MILITANT, HE KNOWS THAT LABOR DISCIPLINE IS REQUIRED IN ORDER NOT TO ALIENATE MODERATE CLASS VOTERS FROM THE WORKING CLASS. END SUMMARY.

1. ON 7 SEPTEMBER GEORGES SEGUY OF CGT SPOKE AT A MEETING IN THE SAINT-OUEN SUBURB OF PARIS (THE SECOND YEAR IN A ROW FOR THE CGT TO HOLD SUCH MEETING OUTSIDE PARIS PROPER) AND EDMOND MAIRE OF CFDT SPOKE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A CFDT RALLY OUTSIDE PARIS, I.E., IN LYON. FORCE OUVRIERE IS ORGANIZING ITS MEETING ON 10 SEPTEMBER IN A SUBURB OF PARIS, THEREBY CONTINUING ITS DETERMINED EFFORT TO COMPETE WITH CGT AND CFDT IN THEIR CAPACITY TO ORGANIZE SUCH MASS RALLIES. WE ARE REPORTING SEPARATELY THE CFDT AND CGT SPEECHES FOR A SHARPER FOCUS ON THE SIGNIFICANCE AND COMPARISON OF THEIR RESPECTIVE POSITIONS.

2. MAIRE AND SEGUY AGREED IN REJECTING CATEGORICALLY THE TRADITIONAL THEORY OF THE "PRICE-WAGESPIRAL" AND THE CLASSICAL REMEDIES THAT SUCH A THEORY HAS INSPIRED IN DEALING WITH THE PROBLEM OF INFLATION. ALTHOUGH THIS STAND LED AUTOMATICALLY TO EXPRESSIONS OF DOUBT ABOUT BARRE'S PROSPECTS OF SUCCESS, THE SIMILARITY OF CGT-CFDT POINTS OF VIEW ENDED THERE. MAIRE SOUGHT TO QUALIFY HIS NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE NEW GOVERNMENT BY CAUTIONING THE FAITHFUL THAT THE "VICTORY OF THE LEFT IS NOT IN THE BAG", AND THEREFORE IT WOULD BE WRONG FOR THE LABOR MOVEMENT TO DEMOBILIZE ITSELF AND TO WAIT UNTIL 1978 IN THE BELIEF THAT ALL LABOR DEMANDS WILL BE SATISFIED THEN. MAIRE HELD OUT THE HOPE THAT A GREAT DEAL CAN STILL BE ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS AND STRESSED IN THIS CONNECTION CFDT'S FOUR PRINCIPAL DEMANDS, NAMELY: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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A) REDUCTION OF ACTUAL WORKWEEK TO FORTY HOURS)PRESENTLY 41.3); B) LOWERING OF RETIREMENT AGE TO 60; C) INCREASE OF MINIMUM WAGE TO 2,000 FRANCS PER MONTH (PRESENTLY ABOUT 1,500 FRS); AND D) CREATION OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES.

3. IN RESPONSE TO REPORTS THAT REACHED HIM JUST PRIOR TO HIS SPEECH THAT SEGUY HAD CRITICIZED CFDT,

MAIRE RESPONDED SHARPLY BY TELLING CGT THAT IT CANNOT
DICTATE POLICIES TO THE LABOR MOVEMENT AND THAT CFDT
PREFERS "CONSTANT DEBATE WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION"
INSTEAD OF THE "FORCED UNANIMITY" WHICH IS CGT'S
CHARACTERISTIC.

ELABORATING ON THE CGT-CFDT RELATIONS MAIRE WAS
SOMEWHAT EQUIVOCAL IN THAT ON THE ONE HAND HE STRESSED
THE IMPORTANCE OF CGT-CFDT UNITY FOR ANY EFFECTIVE

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ACTION BY LABOR, AND ON THE OTHER HAND HE EMPHASIZED
THE REQUIREMENT FOR PRIOR DISCUSSION AND AGREEMENT
BETWEEN CGT AND CFDT ON SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES AND

METHOD BY WHICH THESE OBJECTIVES CAN BE ATTAINED.

4. SEGUY'S SPEECH, FULL OF CATCHY PHRASES, WAS A RESOURCEFUL PRESENTATION OF A TRADE UNION LINE WHICH, WHILE POLITICALLY INSPIRED, SEEKS TO DRESS ITSELF AS AN AUTONOMOUS TRADE UNION STAND. HE WAS SWEEPING IN HIS CRITICISM OF THE REGIME AS "REACTION-ARY AND DANGEROUS", ONE FROM WHICH THE UNIONS CANNOT EXPECT MUCH. HE PAID LIP SERVICE TO THE IDEA OF NEGOTIATIONS ONLY TO ASSERT THAT "NOTHING CAN BE DONE IN FRANCE WITHOUT THE CGT AND EVEN LESS AGAINST IT." LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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5. MOST SIGNIFICANT PART OF SEGUY'S SPEECH WAS HIS ASSERTION THAT A GOVERNMENT OF THE LEFT WOULD FIND IN THE CGT NOT ONLY A COOPERATIVE ORGANIZATION, BUT AN OUTRIGHT ALLY IN THE EFFORT TO CARRY OUT THE COMMON PROGRAM. SUCH A GOVERNMENT OF THE LEFT, HOWEVER, MUST BE COMMITTED TO CARRY OUT THE ENTIRE COMMON PROGRAM IN ORDER TO GET CGT'S COOPERATION, A HARDLY VEILED WARNING TO THE PS LEADERS WHO AT TIMES HAVE RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PACE AND DEGREE TO WHICH THE COMMON PROGRAM SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED. IN PASSING HE REFERRED TO THE CGT'S INDEPENDENCE FROM POLITICAL PARTIES, BUT HE LEFT NO DOUBT ABOUT CGT'S READINESS TO COOPERATE AND ENFORCE DISCIPLINE IF IT WERE DEALING WITH A GOVERNMENT OF THE LEFT.

6. EQUALLY SIGNIFICANT WAS THE SPEECH'S PART WHERE IT CRITICIZED EDMOND MAIRE FOR HIS SUGGESTION THAT THERE BE AN UPPER LIMIT TO SALARIES, NAMELY, 20,000 FRANCS PER MONTH, AND THAT WAGE INCREASES SHOULD BE DIFFERENTIATED SO AS TO FAVOR THE LOWER-PAID CATEGORIES. SEGUY'S POINT WAS TO ASSURE THE CADRES (SUPERVISORS AND TECHNICIANS) THAT THE CGT IS ON THEIR SIDE AND THEY HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM A GOVERNMENT OF THE LEFT. THIS IS CONSISTENT WITH CGT'S IMPRESSIVE EFFORT OF THE LAST FEW YEARS TO WOO THE MIDDLE AND UPPER SALARY GROUPS BECAUSE OF THEIR SOCIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE. THE CGT--AND FOR THAT MATTER THE PCF--APPROACH IS TO DRAW A DISTINCTION BETWEEN SALARIED PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF RATE OF PAY, SMALL MERCHANTS AND FARMERS, ISOLATING AS TARGETS OF CRITICISM AND OPPOSITION BIG COMPANIES AND INDUSTRIALISTS WHO ALONE CAN BE MADE TO FIT THE CATEGORY OF EXPLOITERS AS CGT INTERPRETS MARXISM.

7. COMMENT: THE CGT AND CFDT NEGATIVE ATTITUDE

TOWARDS THE BARRE GOVERNMENT, ALTHOUGH EXPRESSED IN
DIFFERENT LANGUAGE AND TONE, DID NOT COME AS A
SURPRISE. THEIR POLITICAL MOTIVATION IN QUESTIONING
THE FREE MARKET SYSTEM AND ITS INSTITUTIONS IS TOO
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WELL ESTABLISHED TO CAUSE ANY SURPRISES. WHAT IS OF
GREATER INTEREST, HOWEVER, IS THE REVELATION OF SHARP
DIFFERENCES AND TENSION IN THE RELATIONS BETWEEN CGT
AND CFDT. ALSO NOTEWORTHY IS MAIRE'S RELUCTANCE TO
USE UNEQUIVOCAL LANGUAGE IN REBUTTING SEGUY'S
ALLEGATIONS AND CRITICISMS. THE EXPLANATION FOR THIS
LIES IN THE CFDT CONVICTION THAT INDEED VERY LITTLE

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CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED IN FRANCE WITHOUT THE CGT MUSCLE AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS.

NOTWITHSTANDING THE FOREGOING IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT MAIRE CHOSE TO LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITH BARRE. THIS WAS PROBABLY DESIGNED TO PROTECT THE CFDT FROM RANK AND FILE ACCUSATIONS (ALREADY BEING ARTICULATED) THAT IT IS BECOMING SYSTEMATICALLY OBSTRUCTIONIST AND MUCH TOO POLITICAL IN ITS STRATEGY AND TACTICS.

8. SEGUY'S HOLDING OUT THE PROSPECT OF LABOR DISCIPLINE SHOULD THE LEFT COME TO POWER IS PERHAPS THE ASTUTE POLITICAL LINE WHICH THE CGT-PCF WILL BE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HAMMERING FROM NOW ON UNTIL THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. THEY WILL BE SEEKING TO PUT ACROSS THE IDEA THAT FRANCE'S EVILS NOT ONLY REQUIRE ALTERNATIVE POLICIES AS THOSE INCORPORATED IN THE COMMON PROGRAM, BUT ABOVE ALL THE KIND OF LABOR DISCIPLINE WHICH ONLY A GOVERNMENT OF THE LEFT CAN ASSURE THROUGH ITS SPECIAL RELATIONS WITH THE LABOR MOVEMENT AND THE WORKING CLASS AS A WHOLE. IN OTHER WAYS THEY WILL BE TRYING TO APPEAL TO MODERATE MIDDLE CLASS VOTERS WHO ARE DRIVEN TO EXASPERATION BY TRADE UNION MILITANCY AND CONTINUOUS CHALLENGE TO GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES.

9. WHETHER THE CGT WILL TAKE THIS LINE A STEP FURTHER BY AGITATING THE RANK AND FILE SO AS TO CREATE UNREST AND CONDITIONS SIMILAR TO THOSE IN ITALY, HOPING THEREBY TO GENERATE DEMANDS FOR LABOR DISCIPLINE THROUGH A GOVERNMENT OF THE LEFT IS A MOOT QUESTION. IN CONSERVATIVE FRANCE EXCESSIVE AGITATION, ESPECIALLY IF POLITICALLY INSPIRED, IS LIKELY TO CREATE THE OPPOSITE REACTION, NAMELY A DEMAND FOR LAW AND ORDER WHICH ONLY GOVERNMENTS OF THE RIGHT HAVE BEEN COUNTED UPON UNTIL NOW TO PROVIDE. MOST LIKELY THEREFORE CGT WILL KEEP THE POT BOILING BUT PREVENT IT FROM EXPLODING OR EVEN FROM BECOMING AN INTOLERABLE IRRITANT IN THE FRENCHMEN'S EVERYDAY LIFE.
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